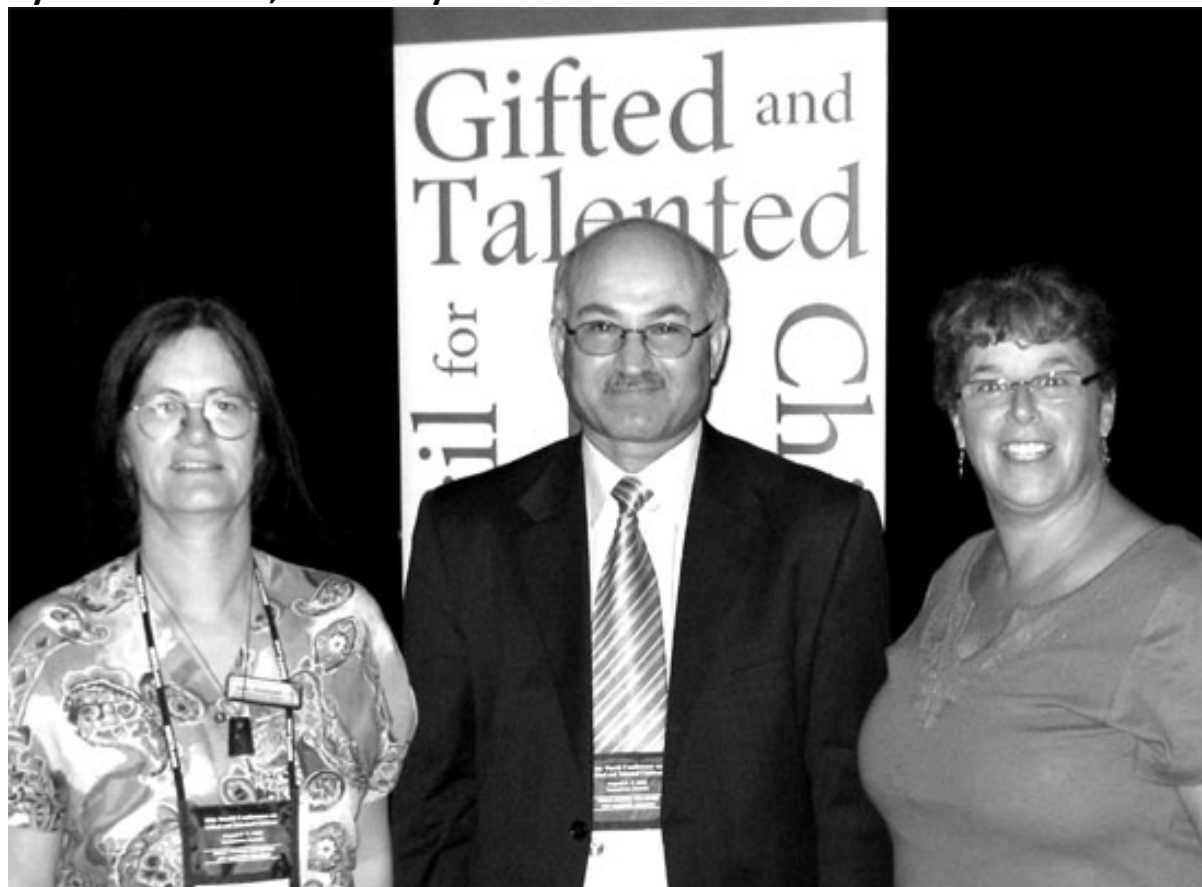


Give them books, give them wings

By Sara Meadow, a One Day School teacher at the Gifted Education Centre.



Sara (left) with Sandi Purdie and Taisir Subhi Yamin at the Vancouver conference

With an interest in children's literature, I chose to attend three very different sessions around the theme of reading.

One of these was a paper given by Susan Stutler, reporting on her participant-researcher study into verbally-gifted grade 6 (NZ year 7) girls. All the pupils were described as showing signs of Dabrowski's intellectual, imaginal and emotional intensities. They actively made time to read, and showed less need for peer acceptance, choosing to read rather than spend time with friends or go shopping. Their lunchtime book club was continued through the summer holidays, so strongly did they feel about it. The girls craved the time and solitude in their lives to read, reflect and experience 'flow', with the accompanying heightened perception and a deep sense of connection to characters, authors and, indeed, to humanity itself.

Drawn to books dealing with problems and issues, such as *A Wrinkle in Time*, by Madeleine L'Engle, and *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*, by Elizabeth George Speare, these girls were described by Stutler as 'self-actualisers', discovering and determining their life's purpose through literature. This supported Piechowski's view that the interworking in, and amongst, the domains of intellectual, imaginal and emotional intensity, lead to personal growth.

After this session I was left wondering whether many schools in New Zealand offer such book club opportunities to gifted readers, and if so, how effective they have been. Does anyone know the answer? (I have also resigned myself to the selective 'deafness' of my reading-besotted 12-year-old youngest child.)

Interestingly, one of the speakers in the second session on literature, Elizabeth Nielsen, also quoted Piechowski's idea of the reader needing to have 'over-excitabilities' in order to go beyond mere technical facility [in reading] and to experience inner transformation. This session was about the use of picture books (even with older students, where Nielsen said they were described as great works of art to make them acceptable). In particular, picture books were used to help explore concepts such as wisdom, truth and friendship. Six criteria for selection were named: complexity; timelessness; sensitivity; pro-action; diversity; and illustrations which go beyond the story, show elements of design and are of an artistic style. Teaching strategies based on Taylor's Multiple Talent Model, Williams' Cognitive- affective Interaction Model or Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives are developed to investigate aspects of the chosen concept.

Nielsen reported that a list of 250 books and activities suitable for use with gifted students would soon become available online, at www.exceptionaltwice.org.

The third book-based session I attended was, for me personally, one of the most challenging intellectually. The title, 'Learning the Basics of Mathematical Logic Through Reading Alice In Wonderland', appealed greatly, but little did I realise this would involve formal logic of the kind taught in US high schools from grades 10 to 12, so I was a bit out of my comfort zone! Despite this, it was exciting to hear that the authors of the paper, Nitsa Movschovitz-Hadar and Atara Shriki, had managed to find 75 quotes from this classic story for use in general education, logic and set theory, science and mathematics. Clever fellow, that Lewis Carroll.

I also bravely did what I am always telling my students to do. I 'had a go', and my rusty maths plus a bit of sheer bravado drove me to volunteer answers where high school teachers wouldn't. And what's more, I got some of the questions right! Which may go to prove that if all those who come to Wonderland (or a logic paper) are mad, and Alice (or Sara) come to Wonderland (or a logic paper), then Alice (or Sara) must be mad. Well, that was one of the really easy ones, but you probably get the drift.

Anything that encourages the reading and re-reading of old favourites like *Alice in Wonderland* is fine by me. Again, I wondered whether there any NZ high school maths teachers using cross-curricular challenges like this?

Finally, the title for this article comes from a quote from Katherine Paterson, used in one session: 'Give them books, give them wings.' As one who benefited as a child from being transported by books to the past, to the future, to distant lands and on pure flights of fancy, I cannot agree more.

Sara Meadows presented a workshop at the Vancouver conference on: Apple, Avocado or Acerola? Analogy as a Fruitful Tool for Exploring Giftedness.